



Observations and Recommendations on Innovate4Water by a neutral observer / participant,

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1. Introduction

This is a brief set of observations and recommendations from the perspective of an individual who is new to the Waterpreneurs community. I attended both days of Innovate4Water event to explore opportunities and to observe the process.

2. The event agenda and format

The agenda was very thoughtfully put together. There was a clear flow and logic. Starting the event with a description of system level challenges and opportunities (e.g. opening with US EPA) and grounding the discussion with the perspective from researchers was useful.

In a future event, it may be worth considering also having investors speak first – their expectations and to understand what they are looking for would be of great interest to many participants. It would also get people focused on the main interest that entrepreneurs have – scaling their businesses.

The solutions were at the heart of the program, and covered a wide range of issues. The facilitation was good, but for those individuals that were not present the whole time, it would have been useful to hear a summary of key points between sessions.

The agenda was extraordinarily busy. This had several effects: it meant that very many people spoke (and felt really involved); it meant that at times it was tiring for the audience to pay attention to everything; and it meant that the moderator became somewhat exhausted after a time.

If it was possible to categorise the pitches and presentations to cover each of the sub-targets of SDG Goal 6, it would be useful. There seemed to be many more WASH focused examples, it would be useful to encourage more presentations by entrepreneurs addressing other sub-targets if that is possible.

As Nick Pendleton said during his day 1 wrap up, the greatest benefit of this format was that it allowed a vast number of people that are the Waterpreneurs community to 'speak up' and be heard. This has the very desirable effect of energizing the audience more than exhausting them.

Having a two-day program, one open and the other closed, was a smart way to simultaneously engage a wide audience, generate some revenue and create intrigue about what was the value of the insights people were expected to pay to gain during day 1.

3. Atmosphere and tone

The atmosphere of the event was extraordinarily positive. The mix of different perspectives, sectors participation, and multiple agenda objectives, combined with a rather informal approach by UN standards, created an atmosphere of openness and trust.

During the networking, there was a remarkably friendly attitude among the participants who were visibly enjoying meeting interesting people. It truly felt like a community of people who wanted to learn from each other and grow together.

For the World Intellectual Property Organisation to be hosting an event that is so collaborative in nature demonstrates an innovative approach. If such an open forum for discussion can generate more sharing and development of shared value, that is an impressive achievement. Hopefully this is something that the article author will describe.

During day 1, there were enough impressive pitches made that it created an excitement and level of engagement that is often associated with VC pitch events. Given the inclusiveness of the approach taken, there were of course also some pitches of less good quality. However, in the spirit of Waterpreneurs, the event was intending to create opportunity for the less experienced. It offered an inspiring platform on which to develop their presenting skills, hone their focus and describe their ambitions. No doubt there will be some stars that rise as a result.

During day 2, the panel presenters were coming from different levels of involvement in the challenges and questions that they were posing. In the South Pole 'challenge' that I presented, for example, we shared some very early and quite general information but hugely benefited from the chance to broadcast our current questions and then receive direct feedback during the break that followed. A very original way of creating connections and fostering opportunity.

In future events, it may be worth being even more careful for the moderators to identify and explain key points, and describe connections between the presentations. This would be the single most effective way to enhance the event for all involved.

4. Developing opportunity and supporting innovation

The most important question for the Waterpreneurs community is how they will build on the discussions and connections that they have made so far? There were some very good, specific examples given of both enterprises and projects that participants wanted to take forwards. How great it would be to follow up with a few of them in several months from now and survey what was implemented or achieved since the event and might be credited (to some degree) to the event itself. Capturing this information will be extremely useful for both building credibility that can be used to attract funding and proving that the Waterpreneurs community deliver significant real world outcomes.

As was mentioned during the closing presentation, one of the other remarkable achievements of the event was how long people stayed. It is rare to keep people late

in the evening on day 2 of an event, but innovate4water did. They obviously felt it really was worth their while.

It will be very interesting for the Waterpreneurs staff to see how engaged people are with the follow up questionnaire. It is long and detailed, I think that you will be able to understand a lot about how engaged people are by how much feedback you receive as well as the content of the feedback.

5. The business case for Innovate 4 Water

An important question is about the transactional outcomes of the event. Were the funds collected sufficient to cover the costs of running it (i.e. is it a viable business model?) Perhaps even more important in some ways is the question of which entrepreneurs go on to have their activities financially enhanced as a result of the event. This could be measured in terms of financing received, new contracts and supplier relationships, or partnerships to build new ventures. These hard data may be difficult to find, but even a few 'success stories' would go a long way to validating the whole effort. In terms of the softer value, as the UNDP representative said, even if you don't raise funds you can raise friends.

6. Linking Innovate 4 Water to the broader narrative and higher-level discourse on water and sustainable development

A good opportunity for leveraging the innovate4water event is through the post-event communications. The five methods that we agreed together will not only disseminate some key insights and memorialise the event, it will also demonstrate to the wider water and development community how Waterpreneurs and innovate4water enhances both the value chain and value network that exists around water.